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The Allegory of the Moths and the Flame, translated from the Mantiq at-Tair of Farīd ad-Dīn 'Attār.—By A. V. WILLIAMS JACKSON, Professor in Columbia University, New York City.¹

Persian poetry has had in its voice a mystic note for more than a thousand years, and one can hardly touch on the theme of Persian literature without ringing changes on the major key of mysticism, because the Ṣūfī note of veiled allegory and masked symbolism is a dominant chord in much of its verse. To appreciate the spirit of Persian poesy's very being, one must understand the fundamental elements of its harmony, its emblematic nature, the delicate interchange of sign and thing signified, subtle play of disguised meanings, esoteric allusions, phraseology with hidden implications that were understood of the elect, and all the refined spiritualization of physical and material images, pseudo-erotic in their nature. This literary species requires that same delicate method of interpretation which may be illustrated by our own understanding of the 'Song of Solomon' or measured by our appreciation of the seventeenth-century English poets Donne, Vaughan, the Fletchers, and Crashaw. Concerning these British bards, our American poet and critic George Edward Woodberry once said: 'The language is that of love-passion, but directed to supersensual objects of sense.' This sentiment may be employed equally to describe most of the Persian Ṣūfī writers.

The paragon of Persian mystic poets in the twelfth century was 'Attār; in the thirteenth it was Rūmī. These two mystics overtop all the rest, even Jāmī in the early fifteenth century. By way of illustration I shall have to content myself here with a few lines from the masterpiece of Farīd ad-Dīn 'Attār, of Nīshāpūr, a composition that gives an allegorical portrayal of the longing of the human soul for union with the Divine.

The birds, assembled, start out on a quest to find the mysterious Sīmurgh-bird, the embodiment of an ideal, under the guid-

¹ This translation, with its introduction, is an extract from the Presidential Address delivered at the meeting of the Society in Washington, April 24, 1916.

ance of their leader, the hoopoo (*hudhud*). To beguile the time on their pilgrimage they narrate stories with a metaphysical bearing. The story narrated in the seventh valley, that of annihilation and death, brings in the idea of merging into the divine essence and finding annihilation in God (*fanā fi'llāh*).²

The poem is filled with the symbolic language of Ṣūfiism. FitzGerald admirably caught its spirit in his free version of the 'Bird-Parliament,' with its catchwords of devotion, hidden under seemingly commonplace terms, and its spiritual ecstacy concealed beneath what appear to be mere offhand allusions. The allegory here presented is given, however, in a version prepared by myself, which adheres more closely to the original text.

THE MOTHS AND THE FLAME

[SEVENTH VALLEY, OR THE VALE OF SELF-RESIGNATION AND
ANNIHILATION (*Faqr u Fanā*)]³

ONE night the Moths into grave Conclave came,
Eager to find the *Taper-lamp*, their aim.
The Conclave voiced: ' 'Tis fit that *one*, a-wing,
Should find the *Goal*, some certain tidings bring.'

A *Moth* flew forth, out toward that Castle far,
Saw in the Castle's court the *Lamp's* bright star,
Flew back, and his report all open threw;
Explained—but without knowledge real—his view.

Then spake the Moth-chief, sage of the Conclave grave:
'No knowledge true of the *Lamp* our envoy gave.'

So went a Second, passed a-close the *Light*,
But only struck the *Taper's* edge in flight.
His wings were singed by the rays of the sought-for Flame;
Yet won the *Lamp*; the *Moth* returned a-lame.
He too, when back, some secrets could reveal,
But naught of *Union* with the *Lamp* unseal.

The Master spake: 'Loved Liege, naught is thy sign!
Thy proffered proof much as thy Mate's, in fine.'

² Cf. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, 1. 438-442; 2. 514.

³ Farid ad-Dīn 'Attār, ed. de Tassy, p. 159 (l. 3958-3971); tr. p. 222-223.

Then flew a Third—drunken with Love's desire,
Folded his wings completely in the *Fire*,
Holding them all the while amidst the *Flame*,
Till, lost in Joy, he One with *It* became.
He grasped the Fire outright from top to toe,
His body like the Fire, one single glow.

The Chief exclaimed—who saw afar, amaze,
His Color, Substance, all in One, i' the Blaze—
'*That* Moth alone, who thus within *It* burned,
The *Mystery* knows—but ne'er to tell returned.'